

The Medieval Trade of the Ports of the Wash

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THE most casual visitor to the ports of the Wash must be conscious that their golden age lies in the past, somewhere in what we choose to call the middle ages. Yet if he tries to discover what it was that caused them to grow to greatness, and when and how this happened, he will find no histories to help him. For in urban studies England still lags far behind, despite the wealth of records, medieval as well as modern, to be found in her towns, not least in that in which we are now assembled. My purpose today¹ is not to give you the results of any profound research into such archives but rather, by way of introduction to this conference, to sketch in very broad outline some of the principal changes in the fortunes of the two chief medieval ports of the Wash: Boston, which the wheel of fortune carried to dizzy heights in the thirteenth century, only to bring it very low by the fifteenth, and Lynn, whose history was less spectacular, but not, perhaps, less varied and interesting.

Boston and Lynn are neither of them ancient towns. They did not exist in Roman times, nor were they among the boroughs of Anglo-Saxon England. Boston was reputedly founded by Breton followers of William the Conqueror;² Lynn, though existing as a vill if not as a borough at the time of the conquest, was of little account until Herbert de Losinga, bishop of Norwich, founded his priory and church of St. Margaret there about 1095.³ Yet only a century later, when King John taxed all the sea-going trade of England, Boston stood revealed as very probably the second port in the land, after London, and Lynn was not far behind. No other port from Newcastle to Fowey, save only Southampton, could stand comparison with either of them, while if to the figures for Boston we add those for Lincoln, whose outport was Boston, then we would seem to have a volume of trade (according to the amount taxed) considerably greater in value than that going in and out through London.⁴ Both towns had by this time enormously increased in size. At Lynn, beyond the original nucleus on the right bank of the Ouse between the two streams of the Purfleet and the Mill Fleet, where still lie the Guildhall, St. Margaret's and the Saturday Market, there were

¹ This article is based on a paper read on 14 April, 1962, at the Spring Conference of the Society for Medieval Archaeology, held at King's Lynn.

² F. M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism, 1066-1166* (1932), p. 26.

³ W. G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (1959), p. 81.

⁴ N. S. B. Gras, *The Early English Customs System* (Cambridge, Mass., 1918), pp. 221-2; Bristol was not included in this tax return for 1203-5. Comparisons must be tentative because of uncertainty, especially in regard to Boston and Lynn, as to the exact coverage of the returns.

extensions both north and south along the Ouse during the twelfth century into two new quarters, each with its own new church—into North Lynn, with its new Tuesday Market and chapel of St. Nicholas, and into South Lynn, with its church of All Saints.⁵

Both Boston and Lynn, in fact, were mushroom growths, witnessing to the immense economic expansion which was so marked a feature of the twelfth century, and which continued into the thirteenth century in England as in lands across the Channel. In that interval of relative calm, when western Europe was neither overrun by foreign invaders nor rent asunder by national wars, population grew rapidly, unhindered by the artificial check of war or by the plague and famine that war engenders; in England the population probably multiplied at least threefold between the Norman conquest and 1300. Everywhere, therefore, there was growing pressure on the resources of what was still a very underdeveloped region. Land hitherto waste was brought under cultivation or converted into pasture for sheep and cattle; the harvest of the sea was exploited as never before; industries new and old absorbed more and more of the surplus population; towns took on a new character with the increasing number of wage-earning artisans congregating within them; trade was stimulated by the new outlets for marketable surpluses of food and the new demands for raw materials thus created, and was hampered scarcely at all by customs dues or other restrictions.

Not least remarkable was the development of the country immediately round the Wash. Before the Norman conquest this was one of the most thinly peopled parts of England, with a population that was probably smaller than it had once been during the Roman occupation; for much of the land reclaimed by the Romans had reverted to waste, and the Wash was now almost cut off from the rest of England by vast stretches of marsh, salt and fresh. The flat coastlands were constantly subjected to inundation by salt sea-water, while inland the low-lying peat fens were soaked periodically by the flood waters of the slow-moving rivers which wound their way across the eastern plain. Here and there were settlements, either on the comparatively high and dry silt belt that separated the peat fen from the coast, or on those islands in the fen where monks had gone, seeking a refuge from the troubles of the world, only to find that the desolate marshes too had their terrors for the faithful. Thus Ely, Crowland, Thorney, Peterborough, and Ramsey rose 'in the midst of a great solitude', where, as a monk of Crowland wrote, 'is a fen of immense size, which begins from the river Granta, not far from the city which is called Grantchester' (i.e. near Cambridge). 'There', he said, 'are vast marshes, now a black pool of water, now foul running streams, and also many islands, and reeds, and hillocks, and thickets, with manifold windings wide and long'.⁶ This great fen extended in the twelfth century from Cambridgeshire far into Lincolnshire, thus very nearly surrounding the Wash.⁷ Now, however, came a concerted attack upon it and upon the salt coastlands.

⁵ Hoskins, *op. cit.* in note 3, pp. 81-3.

⁶ *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St. Guthlac, Hermit of Crowland*, ed. C. W. Goodwin (1848), p. 21, quoted in H. C. Darby, *The Medieval Fenland* (1940), p. 8.

⁷ Cf. British Museum Cotton MS, Julius D VII, ff. 50-53, published in facsimile in *Four Maps of Great Britain Designed by Matthew Paris about A.D. 1250* (London, British Museum, 1928).

Great landowners, lay and ecclesiastical, played their part, stimulated by rapidly-rising land values and rapidly-rising prices for farm produce, together with an abundant supply of cheap labour. The bishops of Ely, for instance, added to almost all their manors in that region by taking in land from the fen; in and around Wisbech they reclaimed some 2,000 acres, draining them, and putting upon their tenants the responsibility for maintaining dykes and ditches.⁸ Sometimes the initiative was taken by land-hungry peasants, working often in cooperation together. Thus H. E. Hallam has vividly revealed to us the truly astonishing labours of the inhabitants of half a dozen villages in south Holland, situated on the silt belt between Spalding on the Welland and Lutton on the Nen-Ouse, with the sea on one side of them and the fen on the other. At least from the very early twelfth century we can trace them reclaiming land on the seaward side, building sea walls, appointing watchmen to warn of exceptionally high tides, stocking the new intakes with sheep and cattle, putting land later on under the plough, and constructing salterns also. In the opposite direction far more extensive lands were won, step by step, from the fen by the communal efforts of the villagers in dyking and draining, pushing the frontiers further and further back. Measurers and dividers were appointed to allot the new land. Each portion was used, as its holder pleased, for tillage, for hay, or for pasture, but as it dried out more and more came to be converted into 'good and fertile ploughland', until at the end of the twelfth century the villagers were so short of pasture that they invaded in force the adjoining pastures of the abbey of Crowland.⁹ By the middle of the thirteenth century Matthew Paris, writing of the fenland, could conclude: 'Concerning this marsh a wonder has happened in our time. In years past these places were accessible neither to man nor beast, affording only deep mud with sedge and reeds, and inhabited by birds, indeed more likely by devils, as appears by the life of St. Guthlac who began to live there and found it a place of horror and solitude. This is now changed into delightful meadows and also arable land'.¹⁰

Thus the immediate hinterland of the ports of the Wash was transformed. The immense increase of population all over western Europe that drove men out into the wastes and forests to clear fresh land for cultivation, into the textile cities of Flanders and Italy to earn their bread by manufacture, or even beyond the bounds of Christendom to win from Moslems or Slavs new lands to colonize, impelled the men of the English 'Low Countries', like those of the Low Countries across the Channel, to reclaim land from the sea, to drain the swamps, and to create new farms and villages all over the fens, villages resplendent with the magnificent churches that are still the glory of the fenland.

The new productivity of the region is strikingly reflected in accounts like those of the bishop of Ely. These show that the bishop's income trebled between the mid twelfth and the late thirteenth century, and that some 50 per cent of the whole came from rents, including rents from the new lands, and some 40 per

⁸ E. Miller, *The Abbey and Bishopric of Ely* (1951), pp. 95-7.

⁹ H. E. Hallam, *The New Lands of Elloe* (University of Leicester, Department of English Local History, Occasional Papers, no. 6, 1954), *passim*.

¹⁰ Darby, *op. cit.* in note 6, p. 52.

cent from farm profits, which had probably increased five-fold since the Norman conquest.¹¹ Large quantities of farm produce from landlords' demesnes or peasants' holdings came into little market towns like Ely for sale, and so down to the ports for shipment along the coast or to lands overseas. Producers, middlemen, and merchants all grew rich on the proceeds, and much of what they handled found its way to Lynn, for Lynn was the natural outlet for the traffic coming down the Great and Little Ouse, which flowed through some of the richest cornlands of England, old as well as new, and it was also directly connected by water with important monastic houses like Ramsey and Crowland and with many other places on or near the Nen and the Welland.¹²

Hence Lynn was shipping quantities of corn, together with malt and ale made from it, throughout the thirteenth century and even earlier. It went thence to Berwick and Scotland,¹³ to Flanders, Zealand and Brabant;¹⁴ to Gascony, specializing more and more in viticulture;¹⁵ and to Norway, whose people lived largely by fishing and forestry. So great was Norway's need, and so closely did it depend on Lynn, that even when export of corn from England was forbidden for fear of dearth, an exception was almost always made in favour of shipments to Norway from Lynn.¹⁶ The archbishop of Trondjhem was given permission by Henry II to buy a shipload of corn in England even in years of scarcity, and this privilege was confirmed by Henry III, who himself sent presents of grain and malt to the king of Norway through Lynn.¹⁷ Ships and merchants of Lynn went to Norway with corn;¹⁸ Norwegian ships came to Lynn to fetch it; once no less than eleven of them were in port at Lynn loading up with corn.¹⁹ But of the total quantities shipped no record survives, so that we cannot assess the extent of the trade.

From the twelfth century onwards English wool was in even greater demand abroad than English corn, for from it, and from it alone, was made the high quality cloth of Flanders that had captured the luxury market all over Europe, while in the later thirteenth century Italian manufacturers also were coming to use it for the making of fine cloths that were beginning to rival those of Flanders. In meeting this demand the lands round the Wash took a leading part. Much of the fenland was stocked with sheep, which were scientifically bred and managed on estates like those of the great Benedictine fenland abbeys. Peterborough and Crowland, for instance, had over 16,000 sheep between them; Spalding and

¹¹ Miller, *op. cit.* in note 8, pp. 82, 94-5.

¹² Miller, *op. cit.* in note 8, pp. 85-6; N. S. B. Gras, *The Evolution of the English Corn Market* (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), p. 62.

¹³ E.g. *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1227-31, p. 356; *id.*, 1259-61, p. 379 (cf. p. 489); *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1317-21, pp. 207-8, 304, etc.

¹⁴ Austin Lane Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, 1087-1216* (1951), p. 90, citing *Pipe Roll 10 Ric. I*; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1227-31, p. 362; cf. *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1303-7, p. 247.

¹⁵ E.g. *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1253-4, p. 124.

¹⁶ E.g. *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum*, ed. T. D. Hardy (Record Commission, 1833-4), I, 606 b, 607, 607 b; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1242-7, pp. 484, 538, 542; cf. *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, 1317-21, p. 432, etc.

¹⁷ L. F. Salzman, *English Trade in the Middle Ages* (1931), p. 365; *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 1226-40, p. 405; *id.*, 1240-45, p. 74; cf. *id.*, 1245-51, p. 138.

¹⁸ *Rotuli Litterarum Clausarum, ut supra* in note 16, I, 464 b, 607 b.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 606 b, 607; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1254-6, p. 443.

Ramsey had very comparable flocks; while the sheep on all the lands of Ely, in and beyond the fens, already at the time of Domesday numbered over 13,000.²⁰ But for sheer quality there was scarcely any wool that could equal that from the Lindsey division of Lincolnshire, where lie the Lincolnshire wolds. Thence rams were bought for breeding elsewhere, and thence came wool that fetched the very highest prices known on the continental markets. Here also large-scale sheep-farming was practised, particularly by newer religious orders like those of the Cistercians, Gilbertians and Premonstratensians, who established many houses in this region in the course of the twelfth century.²¹ A glance at the list of wool-producing monasteries in Pegolotti's handbook for merchants, compiled early in the fourteenth century, at once reveals the importance of Lincolnshire and the fenland, for here we find a greater concentration of houses producing large quantities of wool than anywhere else except perhaps Yorkshire, and in quality the Yorkshire wool could not come up to that of Lincolnshire. FIG. 68 shows monasteries in this region from which, according to Pegolotti, merchants might hope to buy not less than 20 sacks, i.e. some 3 tons, equivalent to the wool of some 5,000 sheep.²² Yet the monastic crop was doubtless but a small proportion of the whole. Lay landlords took up sheep-farming with no less enthusiasm; on the earl of Lincoln's estates in Lincolnshire alone there were flocks comparable, most probably, to those of any of the great religious houses, while innumerable peasants had their humbler flocks which contributed substantially to England's total export.²³

Without English wool the looms of Ypres and Ghent and many other great textile cities would have stopped working. And since Lincoln wool was second to none in quality and quantity, inevitably Boston became the principal wool port of England, out-distancing even London. So important a centre of the wool trade was it, indeed, in the late thirteenth century that wool was attracted thither from far beyond its immediate hinterland, even from Cheshire monasteries like Stanlaw and Combermere,²⁴ while among the merchants who shipped it thence were dealers from Italy and the Low Countries and also from Germany, northern France, and Cahors, as well as from many parts of England.²⁵

Yet England also had a woollen manufacture of international repute, if not yet on the scale of those of Flanders and Italy. She too sold cloth for the luxury market that could compete with the best of the Flemish, and the principal centres of its manufacture were, not surprisingly, in Lincolnshire, at Lincoln and Stamford. In a thirteenth-century metrical list of English towns with their characteristic features Lincoln is noted as famous for its scarlets, and Stamford for its habergets—both cloths of top quality.²⁶ Lincoln scarlets were among the

²⁰ Eileen Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History* (1941), pp. 33, 35; T. A. Raftis, *The Estates of Ramsey Abbey* (Toronto, 1957), pp. 144-152; cf. Pegolotti, as in note 22 *infra*.

²¹ Power, *op. cit.* in note 20, pp. 22-3, 33.

²² Pegolotti, *La Pratica della Mercatura*, ed. A. Evans (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 258 *et seq.*; see also W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce* (5th ed., 1927), pp. 629-41; and H. C. Darby, *An Historical Geography of England before 1800* (1948), p. 243.

²³ Power, *op. cit.* in note 20, pp. 28-31, 34-5.

²⁴ H. J. Hewitt, *Medieval Cheshire* (1929), p. 48.

²⁵ P.R.O. Exchequer K.R. Customs Accounts, 5/1, 2, 4, 5 (15-25 Edward 1).

²⁶ E. M. Carus-Wilson, *Medieval Merchant Venturers* (1954), pp. 211-213.

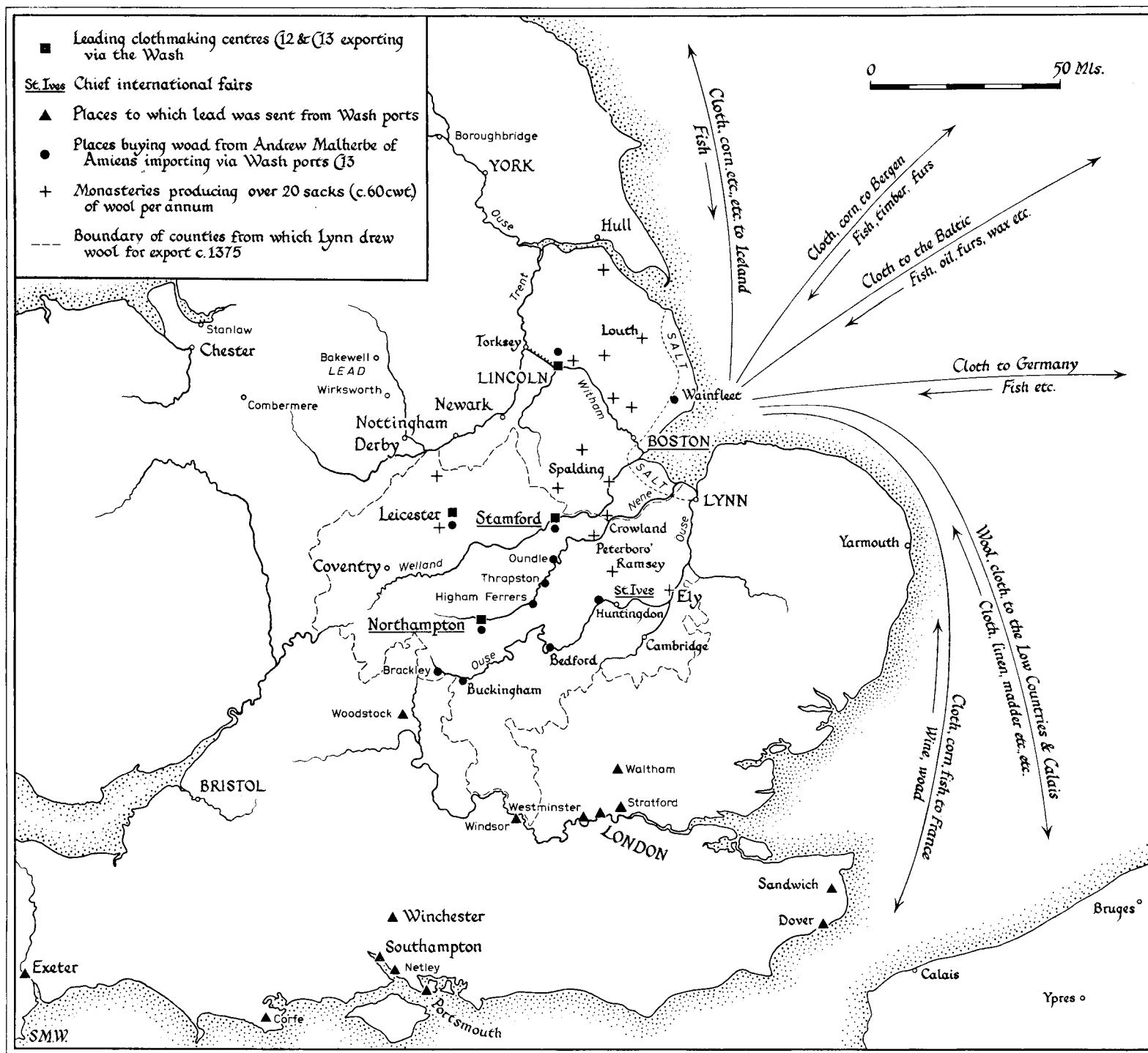


FIG. 68

Map illustrating the regional trade of the ports of the Wash. (For fuller explanation of symbols see pp. 186 ff., 194 f.)

most highly-priced woollens on the Venetian market in 1265, and they were much in demand for royal and noble households in this country and abroad, as were scarlets of Stamford and fine white and coloured cloths of both Lincoln and Stamford. Henry III ordered much for himself from these two towns, as King John had done, and also made presents of Lincoln and Stamford scarlet to his wife's French relations, to the sultan of Damascus, and to King Haakon of Norway and his queen.²⁷ English cloth had, indeed, long been as welcome in Norway as English corn. On one occasion, in 1189, King Sverre went out of his way to express his appreciation of it. Concerned at the prevalence of drunkenness in Bergen owing to excessive imports of wine by the Germans, he summoned a special assembly and addressed his people, contrasting the benefits conferred on his country by the English 'who have come here bringing wheat and honey, flour and cloth', with the harm done by the Germans, who had come with large ships bringing wine 'which people strive to purchase'; 'from that purchase much evil has arisen and no good, for many through overdrinking have lost their lives, and some their limbs; some carry marks of disfigurement to the end of their days; others suffer disgrace, being wounded or beaten. To these Southmen I feel much ill-will . . . If they would preserve their lives or property, let them depart hence'.²⁸ Some high quality English cloth was also made up country as at Leicester, whence cloths came to Boston and Lynn for sale,²⁹ and at Northampton, and cloths from the whole of this eastern producing region were bought for export from the Wash by merchants both English and foreign, as by those Spanish merchants who were robbed by pirates off the coast of Norfolk and who had on board scarlets and other cloths of Stamford, Lincoln, Louth and Northampton, as well as cloth of Yorkshire.³⁰ When exports of cloth—though by aliens only—were first taxed at the beginning of the fourteenth century some half of all the aliens' shipments from Boston, other than wool, consisted of woollen cloth.³¹

The immediate hinterland of Boston and Lynn yielded great quantities of salt. This was produced all round the low-lying shores of the Wash, but particularly in Lincolnshire, either by the evaporation of sea-water—first by exposure to the sun in shallow basins and then by heating over a fire, or by the burning of salt-impregnated peat. Already at the time of the Domesday Survey the salterns of this region were a valuable source of revenue. In the succeeding century their number evidently increased, and there were probably greater concentrations of salterns here than at any other point round the coasts of England; traces of them, detected most easily from the air, may still today be investigated.³² If in part this expansion of salt production served to meet increased needs at home for the table and for preserving meat and dairy produce, primarily, no doubt, it was a

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 211-213, 218 note 4.

²⁸ *Sverrisaga*, translated by J. Sephton (1899), p. 129.

²⁹ Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, pp. 229, 233-4; *Records of the Borough of Leicester*, ed. Mary Bateson, 1 (1899), 83, 84, 86.

³⁰ Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, p. 212.

³¹ P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts, 5/7, 6/2.

³² A. R. Bridbury, *England and the Salt Trade in the Later Middle Ages* (1955), pp. 16-21; *supra*, p. 184; M. W. Beresford & J. K. S. St. Joseph, *Medieval England, an Aerial Survey* (1958), pp. 238-242.

response to the new demands created by the intensified exploitation of the North Sea fisheries to supply Europe's growing population with food. All round the shores of that sea salt was required on an unprecedented scale for preserving fish that could not be sold for consumption while still fresh, and the salterns of the Wash, conveniently situated near to the fishing grounds, became one of the chief sources of supply. Thither, in the thirteenth century, came ships from Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Low Countries, and other parts of England, to load up sometimes with nothing but salt. At the opening of the fourteenth century more salt was probably shipped from Boston than from any other English port, and salt, after cloth, was the principal commodity other than wool exported thence by alien merchants.³³

Inland there was a yet more valuable mineral, lead. The lead mines of Derbyshire, in and around Wirksworth, Bakewell and the Peak, had been worked from the time of the Romans. Together with the mines of the Mendips and those of Alston Moor they provided much of the lead used on the continent, as, for example, for the roofing of Clairvaux.³⁴ Fresh demands were made upon them by the spate of large-scale building operations undertaken in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when everywhere in western Europe new castles, cathedrals, monasteries, palaces, and manor houses were being erected, with lead roofs of unprecedented span, lead gutters and rain-water pipes, lead basins, and lead piping for domestic water supplies. New mines were opened and production stepped up,³⁵ and for the shipment of Derbyshire lead overseas, or round the coasts of England, no port was nearer or more convenient than Boston. Once in Henry II's reign no less than 100 cartloads (some 75 tons) were brought from the Peak to Boston and thence sent by sea to London to be used for Waltham abbey.³⁶ Similarly Derbyshire lead came from Boston to London by sea for Henry III's building works at Westminster and Windsor, for the Tower of London, and for Stratford abbey close by; it was sent also from Boston to Portsmouth, to Sandwich and Dover for Dover castle, and to Southampton for the king's castle at Winchester and for Netley abbey.³⁷ Some even went coastwise from Boston as far as Dorset for Corfe castle, and as far as Devon for Exeter cathedral, via Topsham (FIG. 68).³⁸ Perhaps it was boats taking lead which brought back from Dorset the Purbeck marble used in Ely and Lincoln cathedrals. Derbyshire lead was also shipped from Lynn, as once for Dover castle,³⁹ but its principal sea outlet

³³ Bridbury, *op. cit.* in note 32, ch. ii and appendix E; P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts, 5/7, 5/10, 6/2.

³⁴ L. F. Salzman, *English Industries of the Middle Ages* (1923), p. 41 *et seq.*; *Victoria History of the Counties of England, Derbyshire*, II (1907), 323 *et seq.*

³⁵ See, e.g., *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1251-53, p. 246.

³⁶ *Victoria History of the Counties of England, Derbyshire*, II, 324.

³⁷ *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1247-51, p. 490; *id.*, 1251-53, p. 125; *id.*, 1256-59, p. 231; *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 1226-40, pp. 133, 394; *id.*, 1245-51, pp. 306, 314, 334, 336, 359; L. F. Salzman, *Building in England to 1540* (1952), p. 263; *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Second Year of the Reign of King John, Michaelmas 1200*, Pipe Roll Society, n.s. XII (1934), 89, 209; *id.* for the Fourteenth Year of the Reign of King Henry III, Michaelmas 1230, Pipe Roll Society, n.s. IV (1927), 337.

³⁸ *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 1226-40, p. 475; *id.*, 1247-51, p. 314; L. F. Salzman, *op. cit.* in note 37, p. 263.

³⁹ *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Thirtieth Year of the Reign of King Henry II, A.D. 1183-1184*, Pipe Roll Society, XXXIII (1912), 2, 29.

seems always to have been Boston, though occasionally it went from the Humber. The much lower relative cost of water transport clearly made it worth while to take lead by such circuitous routes, but now and again it was moved direct to destinations in the south of England, e.g. to Windsor via Northampton, or to Southampton via Derby, Coventry and Oxford⁴⁰—a timely reminder that road transport, even for heavy goods, was no rarity to be adopted only when there was no alternative.

Such were the principal goods shipped from the ports of the Wash at the peak of the economic expansion somewhere towards the end of the thirteenth century. But compared with wool other wares were of little account. As the earls said, when discussing the dreary subject of Edward I's financial difficulties, which could only be solved by a tax on wool, 'the wool of England amounts almost to the value of half of the whole land'.⁴¹ Quite a third of all the wool exported from England in Edward's reign, much of it of the very best quality, went out through Boston, as we may trace in the splendid series of customs accounts that begins soon after the first tax on wool in 1275 and continues thereafter for many centuries. In the first decade for which we have such accounts (1280-1290) an annual average of some 10,000 sacks—the wool of some 3 million sheep worth perhaps £60,000 to £100,000—were shipped from its port, nearly half as much again as went out from London.⁴² Boston may thus rank, for the volume of its exports, as England's premier port at that time. Yet the wealth of its merchants can never have equalled that of the merchants of the capital, for Boston owed much of its importance to the fact that it was the outport for Lincoln, then second to none among England's provincial towns—as Hull was the outport for York, and Southampton for Winchester.

The expanding market for English wool brought profit to innumerable English households, great and small, and enabled England to buy from abroad increasing quantities of luxuries and necessaries. Foremost among such imports was wine. On this England as a whole must have spent a considerable proportion of the profits derived from the wool trade; at the end of the thirteenth century probably not less than 20,000 tuns containing 5 million gallons and worth (wholesale) some £60,000 came into her ports.⁴³ How much came into Boston and Lynn we cannot be sure, but in one year for which record survives (1300-1301), when the trade was certainly below the level often attained in the thirteenth century, Boston's imports are put at 1713 tuns, or nearly half a million gallons. They were probably at that time as great as or greater than those of any other provincial

⁴⁰ *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 1245-51, pp. 272, 347, and cf. 295; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1247-51, pp. 346, and cf. 468.

⁴¹ Power, *op. cit.* in note 20, p. 73.

⁴² The summary wool customs accounts for each year during this decade are enrolled on the Pipe and Chancellor's Rolls (P.R.O., E.372 and E.352); from early in the fourteenth century they are separately enrolled on the Enrolled Customs Accounts (E.356). All the wool export figures from these accounts, together with cloth export figures and graphs showing the trends of trade in Boston, Lynn and other ports and for England as a whole, have now been published in E.M. Carus-Wilson and Olive Coleman, *England's Export Trade (1275-1547)*, 1963).

⁴³ M. K. James, 'The fluctuations of the Anglo-Gascon wine trade during the fourteenth century,' *Economic History Review*, 2 ser. iv (1951), 176.

port, though small compared with those of London.⁴⁴ Almost all this wine came from England's overseas dominion of Gascony, and Gascon vintners themselves were actively concerned with its sale in Boston to dealers and household officials who came there to stock up their cellars. The early fourteenth-century accounts of the royal butler, for instance, show us that though most of the royal wines were bought in London or in Gascony, some were procured from importers at Boston, usually for provisioning castles and manors, or for presenting as gifts, in that part of England. Thus wine was sent by the butler from Boston up the Witham to Lincoln, for the bishop's palace; by boat to York and thence by cart to Northallerton; to Grantham, Newark, Nottingham and Castle Donnington; to Spalding, Stamford and Rockingham; to Leicester, Coventry, Kenilworth and Northampton.⁴⁵ Considerable quantities went also from Boston by sea to Scotland in 1300-01, for provisioning the royal forces there, and much went to St. Ives and other great fairs of East Anglia for distribution thence. Earlier thirteenth-century records, which tell also of the distribution of wine from Boston to Norfolk, to Chester and Carlisle, and even to London, suggest that when Boston was at its zenith it held an even more important position in the wine trade.⁴⁶

If wine was a luxury for the well-to-do, fish was by now a necessity for all, while fish oil also was in much demand. Far and wide over England humble labourers working for their lords at harvest time might expect herring for dinner; and herring for breakfast, with bread and butter and beer and perhaps a piece of some other fish too, came to be standard fare in a great household like that of the Percy family throughout Lent, both for the nursery and for the grown-ups. Thus fishmongers were to be found in every little market town, distributing to the remotest corners of the land the harvest of the sea, with some freshwater fish too. All round the coasts of England some fish were caught, and the herring fisheries of East Anglia, centred on the herring fair of Yarmouth, were renowned throughout Europe and attracted fishermen from far and near. But England's needs were no longer met by the fish caught off her own shores; much was also imported from other lands bordering on the North Sea, and from the Baltic where the herring grounds off Skania in south Sweden were being increasingly exploited and were visited each summer by many thousands of boats. Thus ships loaded with almost nothing but fish came into the ports of the Wash. They came from north Germany, like the *Paradise of Hamburg* which was in Lynn with herring in 1254, and like the numerous ships from Lübeck which arrived in Boston in 1303 with fish and fish oil.⁴⁷ They came also from Norway and Iceland, particularly from the famous fish mart of Bergen, to which were brought great quantities of cod from the far northern fisheries, either salted or hard dried and marketed as 'stockfish', besides herring and other fish. Danish pilgrims visiting Bergen in the

⁴⁴ M. K. James, 'The non-sweet wine trade of England during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' (unpublished Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1952), p. 338.

⁴⁵ James, *op. cit.* in note 44, pp. 209, 302, 387; P.R.O. Exchequer K.R. Accounts Various, 77/10.

⁴⁶ *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 1226-40, pp. 331, 338, 386, 469, 474; *id.*, 1240-45, pp. 167, 235-7, 309; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1242-47, p. 193.

⁴⁷ *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1253-54, p. 119; P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts, 5/9, printed in Gras, *op. cit.* in note 4, p. 288 *et seq.*

late twelfth century reported that there was so much dried fish there that it could not be measured or counted, and that the port was crowded with Danes, Swedes, Germans, Englishmen, Irishmen, and Greenlanders, while Matthew Paris, writing of it in the thirteenth century, remarked that at one time 200 merchant ships could have been seen together in its harbour.⁴⁸ In England stockfish became such a staple food that there were 'stockfishmongers' in many towns, as at Coventry, and 'stockfish rows', as at Lynn. From Lynn and Boston fish, dried and salt, was distributed far into the midlands by cart and by boat; boat-loads, for instance, were said constantly to be passing through Lynn on their way 'to Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and elsewhere'.⁴⁹

The northern forests were now becoming as valuable to western Europe as the northern fisheries. By the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries England had cleared much of her own forest, and little of this had in any case been coniferous; yet softwood was already in demand for building.⁵⁰ Hence many ships coming into Boston or Lynn with fish from Scandinavia or the Baltic brought timber also, hard and soft. Some came in the form of building materials like rafters and boards, many of them deal boards; some was made up into shipping requisites like masts, spars, and oars; some into furniture like tables and chests; some into spear shafts. Wax for the manufacture of candles, pitch, rosin, tar, and wood-ash (potash) were equally useful forest products.⁵¹

The forests held even greater prizes in their almost inexhaustible supplies of luxury furs. With clearance and colonization fur-bearing animals had become rare in England, but the immense resources of the northern forests, though known to the west for centuries, were as yet scarcely touched, and the further north the traders went, the softer and richer were the furs that they found. To Novgorod, greatest of all European fur marts, whose empire was said to have been built upon furs, came hunters and trappers with costly wares such as beaver, sable, ermine, and above all 'greywork'—the fur of the Arctic squirrel when taken in the winter after it had turned from red to grey and white. Thence the furs were distributed to the west by Scandinavian traders, as they had been since the early days of Norse seafaring enterprise. Often they went via the *entrepôt* of Wisby on Gothland, to which from the twelfth century onwards western traders, particularly Germans, increasingly resorted.⁵² From Wisby, and from other ports in the Baltic, as well as from Norway, the furs were shipped to England, above all to Lynn and Boston.⁵³ It was to these two ports, or to fairs held in their immediate vicinity, that buyers came from all parts of the country, buying for professional skimmers in London and elsewhere, or for great households. Every man and woman of fashion wore furs, in summer and winter, by day and

⁴⁸ K. Gjerset, *History of the Norwegian People* (New York, 1932) I, 470.

⁴⁹ Salzman, *op. cit.* in note 34, p. 275, quoting *Rot. Parl.*, II, 221.

⁵⁰ *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Thirty-second Year of the Reign of King Henry II, 1185-1186*, Pipe Roll Society, xxxvi (1914), 116; Salzman, *op. cit.* in note 37, pp. 245-8.

⁵¹ Gras, *op. cit.* in note 4, pp. 288 *et seq.*, 374 *et seq.*; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1303-7, p. 125.

⁵² M. Postan, 'The trade of medieval Europe: the north,' *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* II, ed. M. M. Postan and E. E. Rich (1952), 180, 188; Elspeth Veale, 'The London fur trade in the later middle ages' (unpublished London Ph.D. thesis, 1953), pp. 297, 301, 334 *et seq.*

⁵³ See Gras, *op. cit.* in note 4, pp. 288 *et seq.*, 374 *et seq.* for imports at Lynn and Boston.

by night, not only for wealth but for display, and one sign of the growing wealth of the upper ranks of society was a growth in the import of luxury furs. Each suit of robes for a person of quality, though made of warm woollen cloth, had also its linings of fur throughout—linings which showed only at the edges, where they were turned back to reveal them more clearly to the envious beholder, and for the making of such linings vast quantities of skins were required, especially if they were of the Arctic squirrel, then more popular than any other fur. If only the most precious white belly—*minever*—were used, as many as 800 or more skins (each some $5\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{1}{2}$ in.) might be needed for a single lining, though with the less costly *vair*, which included the grey back of the squirrel, a smaller number would suffice. The skins were sewn together, row upon row, with meticulous precision, as we may see them depicted in contemporary illustrations. Once nearly 12,000 squirrel skins, in addition to 80 ermines, were used for the making of a complete set of royal robes.⁵⁴ Henry III thought nothing of spending £100 on furs in a single season, though he was seldom in a position to pay for them, and between 1250 and 1259 he bought from one English merchant alone furs to the value of £1,200.⁵⁵ Almost all his purchases were made at the great East Anglian fairs of Boston, Stamford, and St. Ives, or at Lynn, sometimes from English merchants, sometimes from merchants of Gothland or Norway. Thus we read, for example, of the king's tailor journeying to Lynn in 1245 and there spending £174 17 id. on 'greywork' purchased from Edmund of Gothland and others, and of payments being made at Boston in 1250 to six merchants of Norway and to Ledbroc of Gothland for 'greywork' for the king.⁵⁶

A vivid picture of this traffic in furs is given in Egil's Saga. This tells how Thorolf, a nobly-born Norwegian, equipped a great ship, loaded it almost fully with grey squirrel and other furs such as beaver and sable, which his men had procured during the winter in the mountains, besides some dried fish and hides, and sent it to England to buy 'cloth and other provisions of which he stood in need'. There in England it was reloaded with 'wheat and honey, wine and cloth'.⁵⁷

From Norway came another luxury—the finest birds used in the aristocratic sport of hawking, and it was at Boston and Lynn that these, too, could most easily be purchased. Norwegian falcons and hawks were frequently bought for the king in both places during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and seldom elsewhere; in 1239, for instance, the royal buyers were ordered to purchase four gerfalcons and five goshawks at Lynn.⁵⁸ The birds were on sale at Boston fair in the twelfth century, and were so acceptable that in Lincolnshire payments to the Crown were frequently made in them, instead of in currency; such was the payment of two gerfalcons made over a number of years for licence to take corn

⁵⁴ Veale, *op. cit.* in note 52, pp. 13, 70 *et seq.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 97, 316; *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 1245-51, p. 273; *Calendar of Close Rolls*, 1242-47, p. 418.

⁵⁷ *Egil's Saga*, translated by E. R. Eddison (1930), p. 30.

⁵⁸ *Calendar of Liberate Rolls*, 1226-40, p. 384; cf. *id.*, 1226-40, p. 340; *id.*, 1240-45, pp. 138, 185, 211, 298; *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Twenty-second Year of the Reign of King Henry II*, 1175-6, Pipe Roll Society, xxv (1904), 77. Falcons and hawks appear in the earliest customs accounts of imports at Boston (1303), and some of the falcons are valued at three times as much as the goshawks (*hostours*): Gras, *op. cit.* in note 4, pp. 296, 300.

to Norway.⁵⁹ Careful handling must have been needed for the six gerfalcons and six gentle falcons (*falcones gentiles*) that a special messenger from King Henry III came to Lynn to fetch in 1245; they were a gift from King Haakon of Norway, who knew well what would be welcome in return for the fine scarlet cloth sent him from England, and who on more than one occasion sent Henry presents of the great northern gerfalcons from Iceland that were the most sought after of all.⁶⁰ Haakon, writing once to Henry III about a present of such birds that he was despatching to him, said that his falconers had been two whole years in Iceland seeking them, enduring unbelievable cold and hunger, and that he hoped to hear that Henry appreciated them as much as did his father and his predecessors, who were said to have esteemed them more highly than gold and silver.⁶¹ On the beautiful 'King John' cup which is one of the most precious treasures here in this Guildhall at Lynn, and one of the finest examples of medieval goldsmiths' work to be seen anywhere, such hawks and falcons are vividly portrayed (PL. XXI), perched on the gauntleted fists of fashionable women of surpassing elegance, or held by a page; the largest of these birds must surely represent the great northern gerfalcon.

If some of the robes of the nobility, lined with northern furs, were made out of fine English cloth, many of them were made of cloth manufactured in Flanders, where the woollen industry was much more highly developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries than it was in England. Large quantities of this Flemish cloth, brilliant in colour and almost all of luxury quality, were brought in to Boston and Lynn, and its sale constituted one of the main features of the celebrated East Anglian fairs, while drapers of Ypres, Ghent, Douai and elsewhere, who themselves imported the cloth, were also active in selling it far up country. To the great fairs came buyers for the nobility and the royal household, and though some Flemish cloth was bought elsewhere, as at Winchester fair, almost all the bulk purchases of cloth for the royal wardrobe were made at the fairs of Boston, Stamford, Northampton, and St. Ives. At St. Ives a special wardrobe was once constructed to keep cloth bought for the king,⁶² and that the best choice of all was to be found here in the thirteenth century is clear from the little treatise written by Bishop Grosseteste for the young widowed countess of Lincoln on how she should manage her affairs. Advising her as to where she should shop, he told her to buy wines and other goods at different ports round the coast according to which of her many houses they were needed for, but as for her dress materials he counselled 'Your robes buy at St. Ives'.⁶³

Linen and canvas were also imported in such quantities that there were substantial groups of 'Mercers' and 'Merchants of Canvas' at Boston and elsewhere,

⁵⁹ E.g. *The Great Roll of the Pipe for the Fifth Year of the Reign of King Henry II, 1158-9*, Pipe Roll Society, 1 (1884), 45; *id. for the Thirty-first Year of the Reign of King Henry II, 1184-5*, Pipe Roll Soc., xxxiv (1913), 91; *id. for the Thirty-second Year of the Reign of King Henry II, 1185-6*, Pipe Roll Soc., xxxvi (1914), 57, 68.

⁶⁰ *Calendar of Close Rolls 1242-47*, p. 365; *Letters of Henry III*, ed. W. W. Shirley (Rolls Series, 1862), 1, 216-17, 486; cf. also *id.*, 1, 485 and 11, 330 for Norwegian merchants in Boston and Lynn.

⁶¹ *Id.*, 1, 486. For presents of falcons (including three ferfalcons 'of the more elegant kind') and furs from King Magnus to Edward I see, e.g., Rymer, *Foedera* (London, 1704), 1, 533.

⁶² T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England* (Manchester, 1928), iv, 360.

⁶³ *Walter of Henley's Husbandry*, ed. E. Lamond (1890), p. 145.

as of 'Vintners', 'Skinners', and 'Drapers'.⁶⁴ Not less prominent were spicers, or grocers, dealing in pepper and other spices from the far east and also in a variety of other imports, many of them luxuries from southern Europe. From Spain, for instance, came figs, raisins and dates; olive oil and soap; fine Spanish leather ('Cordovan'), and occasionally wine.⁶⁵ So familiar were Spaniards in the ports of the Wash that one of them, 'John de Ispannia', became mayor of Lynn at the end of the thirteenth century.

The grocers also handled most of the dyestuffs that were needed for the native English textile industry. Such was the brasil, or red-wood, that came from the East Indies, the best quality of all being found, according to Marco Polo, in Ceylon; this was much used in England, as in Flanders, in the thirteenth century, and was mentioned in contemporary regulations for dyeing, as at Northampton. The much more costly red dye, grain, was also imported, besides the humbler red madder, much of which came from Zealand, though it was grown also in England, and litmus, which came from Norway. But even more important was the one and only blue dye, woad, which was essential for dyeing all the many shades of blue, green, violet, and also black.⁶⁶ Vast quantities of it were imported, almost all by merchants of Picardy, where the woad plant was grown, harvested and ground into powder, and these merchants themselves carried it throughout the length and breadth of England, even to the Lake District. When the goods of all Frenchmen in England were confiscated in 1294 the Picards were found to have more woad at Lynn than at any other port, and from Lynn the dye was distributed through the principal cloth-making districts of England. Andrew Malherbe, for example, a prominent burgess of Amiens, had a warehouse full of woad at Lynn, and he sold woad to English dyers in Lincoln and Stamford, in Northampton and Leicester, through the county of Northampton, as in Oundle, Brackley, Higham Ferrers and Thrapston, and in Bedford and Buckinghamshire (FIG. 68). Malherbe seems to have dealt solely through Lynn, while different Picard merchants did business through other ports, supplying Yorkshire, for example, mainly through Hull, and Norfolk mainly through Yarmouth.⁶⁷

No customs accounts are available to us, except for wool and hides, until the early fourteenth century; but from the moment that the New Custom was imposed, in 1303, on all goods imported into England by foreign merchants we have some record at least of the activities of foreign ships and shippers in Boston and Lynn. From these accounts many other wares could be added to our list of goods imported at Boston and Lynn at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but particular mention may perhaps be made here of metals and metal products, such as copper and steel from the Baltic, and swords and helmets from Cologne, a whole boat-load of which arrived once in Boston. These last would seem to be the only wares, of all those we have mentioned, which could possibly

⁶⁴ *A Lincolnshire Assize Roll for 1298*, ed. W. S. Thomson (Lincolnshire Record Society, xxxvi, 1939), p. 123.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; P.R.O. Exchequer K.R. Customs Accounts, *passim*.

⁶⁶ Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, pp. 215-20.

⁶⁷ E. M. Carus-Wilson, 'La guède française en Angleterre: un grand commerce du moyen age,' *Revue du Nord*, xxxv (1953), 89 *et seq.*

have left any trace for the archaeologist; the principal exports and imports on which the trade of the ports of the Wash depended remain invisible save in the records.

In the thirteenth century, then, the harbours of Boston and Lynn were frequented by the ships and merchants of England, Norway, Gothland and other parts of the Baltic, of north Germany and Cologne, of Flanders, Holland and Zealand, of France—particularly Picardy and Gascony, of Spain and Italy. The greatest international fairs in England (other than that of Winchester) were held in their vicinity, at Boston itself, at St. Ives, Stamford, and Northampton, with other lesser fairs, such as that at Lynn, attracting a cosmopolitan throng of buyers and sellers, and here the royal wardrobe made most of its purchases of fine cloth and rich furs. To these two ports were drawn the corn of the fertile fenland, the wool of the finest pastures in England, the cloth of her leading textile towns, the lead of Derbyshire, and the salt of the low-lying coastlands round the Wash, while from abroad came luxuries to meet the growing demands of the wealthy upper classes, fish for the masses, and raw materials for the textile and building industries. Thence these wares were distributed into the heart of England, along the magnificent waterways which have their outlet in the Wash, and along the roads which also carried much traffic. When cloth was bought at Boston fair over a number of years in the late thirteenth century for the monks of Durham it was sent first to Lincoln, then by cart to Torksey (for the canal between the Witham and the Trent was then obstructed), by boat down the Trent to the Humber, and on up the Ouse to York and as far as Boroughbridge, whence it went on to Durham by cart.⁶⁸ That Lynn owed its importance not a little to its excellent lines of communication by water over a wide area is illustrated by a fourteenth-century petition to Parliament urging that Lynn should be made a staple port, on the ground that 'various streams ran through the counties of Warwick, Leicester, Northampton, Rutland, Bedford, Bucks., Huntingdonshire, and Cambridgeshire, by which wool and other goods could be conveyed more easily and cheaply to Lynn than to any other port'.⁶⁹ The petition was granted.

But already in the late thirteenth century change was in the air; before long events beyond their control were fundamentally to alter the business prospects of merchants of Boston and Lynn, bringing Boston itself almost to ruin.

The confiscations of Frenchmen's goods in 1294 were but a symptom of the uneasy relations between the kings of England and France which were to reach a climax with the outbreak of the Hundred Years War early in the fourteenth century. During that war the wine trade between the two realms contracted sharply and prices for wine rose steeply; in one year (1350-51) less than 300 tuns came into Boston, and in another year (1371-72) only 10. Nor, though there was some recovery in the late fourteenth century, did the trade ever regain its pre-war volume.⁷⁰

Even greater changes were taking place in the far north, where the encroach-

⁶⁸ J. W. F. Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (1948), p. 311.

⁶⁹ *Rot. Parl.*, II, 319. For the area covered see FIG. 68.

⁷⁰ James, *op. cit.* in note 43, *passim*; *op. cit.* in note 41, p. 339.

ments of the Germans were bringing virtually to an end the once flourishing trade of the Norwegians. By the late thirteenth century, when a long line of German colonies lay strung out along the Baltic's southern shores, German merchants were so strongly entrenched in Bergen and in Novgorod that both these once famous centres of Norse enterprise had come almost wholly under their control. All traffic with Norway and her dependencies, Iceland included, was forbidden except through Bergen, and in Bergen the Germans reigned supreme. Norwegian ships and Norwegian merchants almost disappeared from Boston and Lynn in the course of the fourteenth century, but more and more in evidence were the ships and merchants of the German Hanse: from Hamburg, Lübeck, Stralsund, Rostock, Münster, Wittenberg and many another city.⁷¹ In Boston we may still see the memorial brass of one of these German merchants of the early fourteenth century—Wisselus de Smalenburg of Münster, who was buried in the Grey Friars church there in 1340.⁷²

In the Low Countries too the Germans were becoming steadily more influential. More and more the marketing of Flemish cloth passed into their hands, and together with the Italians they virtually drove the Flemings off the seas, depriving them both of the business of importing wool and of that of exporting cloth. The Hanseatic *kontor* at Bruges rivalled in importance those at Novgorod and Bergen, and increasingly the trade between Flanders and England became dependent upon the Germans.⁷³ In England too they had their *kontors*, with their own wharves, warehouses, halls, taverns, and dwelling-houses. Such was that at Lynn, the remains of which may still be seen; it was doubtless a miniature of the more famous *kontor* in London, close to London Bridge, where the Germans lived a privileged existence, ruled by their own governor according to their own laws by treaty rights purchased from English kings, who on occasion even pawned to them the crown of England. So all-pervasive was German influence in Lynn in the mid-fourteenth century that mayors of Lynn even chose to be remembered in their parish churches by memorials in the German style, most probably made in Germany. The remarkable brasses in St. Margaret's to Adam de Walsoken (1349) and Robert Braunche (1364), the former showing, in addition to the principal figures, a country scene with corn being taken to the mill, and the latter a regal banquet with minstrels playing and peacocks being served, are quite unlike any brasses known to have been engraved in England, but very like brasses of the same period at Lübeck, Stralsund, and Thorn.

If Flemish, like Gascon, merchants were vanishing from the ports of the Wash, so too was Flemish cloth. Not only was its import at one time totally prohibited by Edward III, but the cost of its raw material, with steeply increasing taxes on the export of wool to pay for the war, became so heavy that it was less and less easy for it to compete with cloth manufactured in England where costs were much lower. By the mid fourteenth century its import, save for a few

⁷¹ P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Customs Accounts, *passim*; Gras, *op. cit.* in note 4, pp. 273 *et seq.*, 288 *et seq.*, 374 *et seq.*

⁷² The brass was later removed to the church of St. Botolph.

⁷³ Postan, *op. cit.* in note 52, pp. 224-26.

specialities, had ceased. English cloth had captured the home market, and was soon to make rapid strides in foreign markets also.⁷⁴

At the same time the wool export trade, that had been the glory of Boston, shrank catastrophically, stricken by high export duties, by frequent embargoes, by the Crown's constant interference with a trade that had hitherto been open and uncontrolled, and by growing demands from English manufacturers. By the late fourteenth century England's total wool exports were less than half what they had been before the opening of the Hundred Years' War, while exports from Boston contracted yet more disastrously from some 10,000 sacks to some 3,000, for what little was left of the wool trade passed mainly through London, *en route* for the staple at Calais, or through Southampton, *en route* for Italy.⁷⁵

Even the export of English salt declined, ceasing altogether in the course of the fourteenth century. For alternative sources of supply were being developed in warmer, sunnier lands, where salt could be produced from sea-water by natural evaporation only, at such little cost that it could be sold on northern markets, despite the cost of transport, more cheaply than northern salt. By the late fourteenth century large quantities of such salt were being shipped from Spain, Portugal, and still more from the west coast of France, especially the Bay of Bourgneuf, to England and to the whole of northern Europe, even to the Baltic. English, as well as German and other ships were going to fetch it, like a ship of Lynn which went to 'the Bay' for salt in 1364 taking coal, cloth and money.⁷⁶

As for the corn trade, it had been radically affected by the development of new cornlands in the Baltic during the great eastward movement of German colonization that reached its climax in the late thirteenth century. It was from this quarter, inevitably, that Norway, now under the domination of the Germans, secured most of her supplies. Indeed England herself was from time to time a buyer of Baltic grain, sometimes for re-export;⁷⁷ the corn that Robert Braunche shipped to the Low Countries may perhaps have been Baltic in origin. Thus, like the salt trade, the grain trade of the Wash continued in some measure but in a reverse direction, except for re-exports and the coasting trade, for England was now frequently an importer.

The future for England's export trade lay clearly in the export of English cloth. But in this neither Boston nor Lynn could hope for any very considerable share to compensate for the loss of the wool trade. The worsted industry of Norfolk marketed its products not through Lynn but through Norwich and Yarmouth, just as it was supplied with dyestuffs thence rather than from Lynn.⁷⁸ New centres of the woollen industry were developing rapidly in England, producing middle-price woollens, now much more in demand than luxury woollens both at home and abroad, and eclipsing altogether the old-established industries of Lincoln and Stamford, and that of Leicester. Of these new centres that in the west of

⁷⁴ Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, p. 242.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, chart facing p. xviii; P.R.O. Exch. L.T.R. Customs Accounts (E.356), as note 42.

⁷⁶ Bridbury, *op. cit.* in note 32, *passim*; Salzman, *op. cit.* in note 17, p. 373.

⁷⁷ Postan, *op. cit.* in note 52, p. 190.

⁷⁸ *Supra*, p. 194.

England marketed its products mainly through Bristol; that in the West Riding of Yorkshire mainly through Hull; and that in Suffolk and Essex mainly through Ipswich and Colchester, except in so far as they all dealt with London.

Yet there was still a not insignificant woollen industry in Northamptonshire, for which the natural outlet was Lynn, while only a little farther off, in Warwickshire, Coventry had by the later fourteenth century blossomed into one of England's chief cloth-manufacturing towns and fourth city of the realm, leaving Lincoln far behind.⁷⁹ Situated in the very centre of England, Coventry was about equidistant from four great ports—Chester, Bristol, London and Boston. Through Chester it traded with Ireland, selling its cloth there and bringing thence Irish wool, and Irish craftsmen too.⁸⁰ Through Bristol it sent cloth to Spain and Portugal, bringing back woad for the famous 'Coventry blue' and wine for its well-to-do burgesses; and in each of these ports Coventry merchants had their own ships out on the high seas.⁸¹ But even more important markets for English cloth were now opening up in lands round the Baltic, especially in Prussia, and these could best be reached through Boston, nearest of all east coast ports to Coventry, and one with ancient links with the Baltic. Hence through Boston Coventry merchants took an active part in that English penetration of the Baltic which was so marked a feature of the late fourteenth century. In a fight with the Germans off Stralsund in 1398 a ship of Boston was captured with a large quantity of coloured cloth belonging to three Coventry merchants; one of them was the mayor, John Crose, who helped to build the merchants' hall of St. Mary's, which still survives, and who presented a font to the first great church of St. Michael, then reaching completion, but now in ruins.⁸² Another Boston ship that was seized a few years later by men of Lübeck, Hamburg, Rostock and Wismar was laden with goods of Coventry, Boston and Lynn,⁸³ and that merchants of Lynn were resident in the Baltic in the late fourteenth century is shown by an incident at Stralsund in 1391 when all the merchants of Lynn in that city were arrested and the keys of their houses and chests taken away.⁸⁴ In return for these cloth exports large quantities of fish and other Baltic wares arrived in Boston and Lynn to be distributed thence far into the interior, and Coventry fishmongers, like Coventry drapers, sent their own ships out on the high seas from the ports of the Wash, as well as from Bristol.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Hoskins, *op. cit.* in note 3, p. 176 (list of provincial towns giving tax-paying population of each according to the returns of the Poll Tax of 1377).

⁸⁰ *Rolls of Warwickshire and Coventry Sessions of the Peace, 1377-97*, ed. Elizabeth G. Kimball (Dugdale Soc., 1939), pp. 27, 28, 46, 83, 85; Rymer, *Foedera*, sub 28 April, 1356; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1377-81*, pp. 89, 281; *id.*, 1374-77, p. 408; *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1374-77*, p. 438; P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Memoranda Rolls, Ric. II, Hilary m. 12d.; Ancient Petitions, 296/14790; *Rot. Parl.*, II, 372a; Statute 50 Edward III, c. 8; for Coventry drapers in Ireland see, e.g., *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1401-05*, p. 458; *id.*, 1436-41, p. 222; cf. *Coventry Leet Book*, ed. M. Dormer Harris (1907-13), p. 426 etc.

⁸¹ *The Overseas Trade of Bristol in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. E. M. Carus-Wilson (Bristol Record Society, VII, 1936), pp. 41, 193; Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, pp. 5, 7, 8, 258; Chester Customs Entry Book, 1470-85, at the Town Hall, Chester.

⁸² *Litterae Cantuarienses*, ed. J. B. Sheppard (Rolls Series, 1889), III, 79-81.

⁸³ *Calendar of Close Rolls, 1429-35*, p. 155; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1429-36*, p. 220.

⁸⁴ *Litterae Cantuarienses*, *ut supra* in note 82, III, 80.

⁸⁵ *The Overseas Trade of Bristol*, *ut supra* in note 81, p. 130; P.R.O. Exch. K.R. Memoranda Rolls, 9 Henry VI, Mic. m. 19; cf. *Coventry Leet Book*, *ut supra* in note 80, p. 246 etc.

The importance of these cloth exports from the Wash in the late fourteenth century must not be exaggerated. They formed but a tenth of the total quantity of woollen cloth exported from England at this time. Boston and Lynn still derived most of their profit, in so far as exports were concerned, from raw wool, exports of which were worth perhaps twice those of manufactured cloth, severely diminished though they were. Lynn, indeed, was exporting about as much wool as she had done at the beginning of the century (from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 thousand sacks), so that her total export trade, including that in manufactured woollens, was perhaps greater than it had been, while that of Boston had already shrunk by some two-thirds.

It was the ever-present need for fish, as well as for fresh markets for England's expanding output of cloth, that led to a new and daring venture at the opening of the fifteenth century, when men of Boston and Lynn, together with those of Bristol and some other ports, challenged the monopoly of the Germans in Europe's far northern waters. Ignoring the edict that fish from Norway or any of her dependencies might be bought only in Bergen, they sent their ships direct to Iceland, following in the wake of east coast fishermen who had found their way thither about 1412 and were now actively exploiting the finest cod fisheries of Europe. In their ships they took everything of which that lonely outpost of civilization stood in need—corn, malt, beer, pots and pans, needles and thread, hats, shoes, nails, horse-shoes, and much besides, but above all good English cloth. These they bartered for hard dried stockfish, thus renewing England's ancient links with Iceland.⁸⁶ A bench-end carved about this time for the rebuilt church of St. Nicholas at Lynn, described in 1419 as 'that most beautiful chapel of St. Nicholas, newly built and constructed by the alms of the benevolent', shows vividly (PL. XXII, A) the new type of ship that was doubtless used for the Iceland venture—its mainmast square-rigged as of old, but its mizzen with the new-fashioned lateen sail.⁸⁷ So rapidly did the trade develop that Lynn soon had its recognized body of 'merchants of Iceland' who, like the 'merchants of Norway', 'merchants of Prussia', and 'other merchants', elected two of their number for taxing the merchants in 1424, while a German agent in Iceland warned the king of Denmark that unless the voyages were stopped the whole island would become an English colony. Such was the influence of the Germans that the king did their bidding and forbade the voyage. The very interesting Congregation Books here in the Guildhall of Lynn record the discussion that took place when the king's decree was read out, in an English translation, before a 'congregation of merchants of Prussia, Skania, and Bergen' in 1426. The merchants frequenting Iceland were summoned and forbidden to sail; a ship which was found in a haven near by about to depart for Iceland a few weeks later was arrested; and when a London ship on its way back from Iceland that autumn put in at Lynn a stormy scene ensued, for the captain, it was said, taunted the Lynn men with being traitors for abandoning Iceland and continuing to go to Bergen. Thus Lynn banned the

⁸⁶ Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, p. 98 *et seq.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6; this carving, with another bench-end fragment showing a smaller ship (PL. XXII, B), was sold by the churchwardens and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Iceland voyage. But from other ports, if not from Lynn, it continued in some measure, by special licence, and through Boston Coventry drapers and fishmongers sent cloth to Iceland and imported fish, sometimes in their own ships.⁸⁸

If Lynn hoped by banning the Iceland voyage to secure her trade with Bergen and the Baltic she was doomed to disappointment. The Hanse seized every opportunity to strengthen their own hold on the northern trade, while the English, resenting the Hanse privileges in England as much as their attempts to monopolize the Scandinavian and Baltic trade, again and again took the law into their own hands. The conflicts between them reached a climax in 1449 with the English seizure of the Hanse salt fleet from the Bay, and the war that followed resulted in the total exclusion of English merchants and English cloth from the Baltic, at the very moment that the last and most disastrous phase of the Hundred Years' War with France resulted in the exclusion of the English from Bordeaux and, for a time, in the almost complete stoppage of the wine trade.⁸⁹ Not until 1475 was the long struggle with France ended by the Treaty of Picquigny. In the same year peace was concluded also between England and the Hanse, though on terms very favourable to the Germans, who returned to this country with all their privileges restored and with additional guarantees from London, Lynn, Boston, and Hull. Hence trade with the Baltic remained largely in German hands, and not until the mid sixteenth century were English merchants again as active in that region as they had been in the late fourteenth century. The Iceland trade also, though permitted by special licence, continued to be fraught with difficulty, since Hanse merchants too were invading the island in force; clashes were frequent, and only with the advent of the Tudors was a firm peace made, allowing the English to go there freely.⁹⁰

Thus the trade of Boston and Lynn suffered a severe setback in the mid fifteenth, as in the mid fourteenth century. To some extent it revived at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, but it remained as much diminished in volume as it was changed in character, compared with the high peak of the late thirteenth century. The wool trade continued inexorably to contract; by the close of the fifteenth century England's total exports were but a quarter of what they had been before the Hundred Years' War. Lynn shipped virtually no wool at all, and Boston only some 1,000 sacks, as compared with some 10,000 two centuries earlier.⁹¹ Boston's decline was thus the more dramatic, for since so high a proportion of the wool trade, when that trade was at its zenith, had passed through its port, the city had reached a pinnacle far higher than that ever reached by Lynn and its fall was accordingly the greater. The wine trade of Boston and Lynn was now negligible; whereas once over 1,000 tuns from a single vintage had been

⁸⁸ Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, p. 111 *et seq.*

⁸⁹ M. Postan, 'The economic and political relations of England and the Hanse from 1400 to 1475' in *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century* (ed. Eileen Power and M. M. Postan, 1933), p. 111 *et seq.*; Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, pp. 133 *et seq.*, 274 *et seq.*

⁹⁰ Postan, *op. cit.* in note 89, pp. 137-8; Carus-Wilson, *op. cit.* in note 26, pp. 139-142.

⁹¹ P.R.O. Exch. L.T.R. Customs Accounts. Some of this wool was exported by up-country merchants like Robert Onley, twice mayor of Coventry, (see, e.g., Boston customs account for 1464). Onley's son was apprenticed to a London mercer, and was thus evidently destined for the newer business, with better growth prospects, of exporting cloth to the Low Countries.

landed on the shores of the Wash, in the last decade of the fifteenth century an annual average of only 53 tuns came into Boston and 54 into Lynn.⁹² There was still some slight export of cloth from Lynn, though much less than in the late fourteenth century, but from Boston there was scarcely any at all; the cloth of the midlands had by now been mostly diverted through London to the Low Countries or through Southampton to the Mediterranean, and it was from Southampton that Coventry now received much of its woad.⁹³ Flemish cloth had completely disappeared, and so had squirrel skins—for fashions in dress had altogether changed; furs of any kind were no longer the status symbol they had once been, and the fur market, such as it was, had moved to London. St. Ives and the other once famous international fairs of East Anglia were virtually dead. Hence at the opening of the sixteenth century the trade of Boston and Lynn subsisted on a much lower level than that of two centuries earlier. There were still some shipments of corn, if only coastwise or as a re-export, and of malt and ale; a little lead was exported, with some wool from Boston and some cloth from Lynn. Fish was still imported, with timber and other forest products from Scandinavia and the Baltic, brought largely in Hanseatic vessels, while from southern Europe, most often via the great international fairs of the Low Countries, now principal mart for the ever increasing quantities of English cloth sold on the continent, came olive oil and soap, spices, linen and canvas, and dyes such as madder, besides hops for making English beer, and new southern delicacies like sugar and oranges.

Yet if the story of Boston and Lynn in the later middle ages is one of decline, and of the shift of international trade away from these ports, the increasing variety of luxuries and miscellaneous manufactured goods imported there, mainly from the Low Countries, witnesses surely to a rising standard of life among the English middle classes generally. The Lynn customs accounts for 1503-4, for instance,⁹⁴ record the import not of costly wares like furs and fine scarlet cloth for the nobility, but of an almost infinite number of lesser consumer goods like feather beds and feather-bed ticks, lamps, copper kettles, drinking glasses, tankards, pepper grinders, knives and scissors, playing tables and counters, market baskets, straw hats, two lutes valued at 3s. 4d. and two dozen copies of St. John's Gospel at 1s. The role of Boston and Lynn was more modest than it had once been, but though these ports were now outside the main stream of England's international trade, their hinterland was still prosperous and productive, if relatively less wealthy than formerly, and a potential market for a great variety of imports.

⁹² James, *op. cit.* in note 44, p. 356.

⁹³ *The Brokage Book of Southampton, 1443-1444*, ed. Olive Coleman (Southampton Record Series, v-vi, 1960-61), *passim*.

⁹⁴ Gras, *op. cit.* in note 4, p. 646 *et seq.*